

S E R V I N G  
Y O U N G  
I N F A N T S

*Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors*



# Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series

This booklet describes development, security, and brain growth for infants from birth to 9 months and is for teachers and home visitors serving this age group. The document was developed by the Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC) @ ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Office of Head Start.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
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## Introduction

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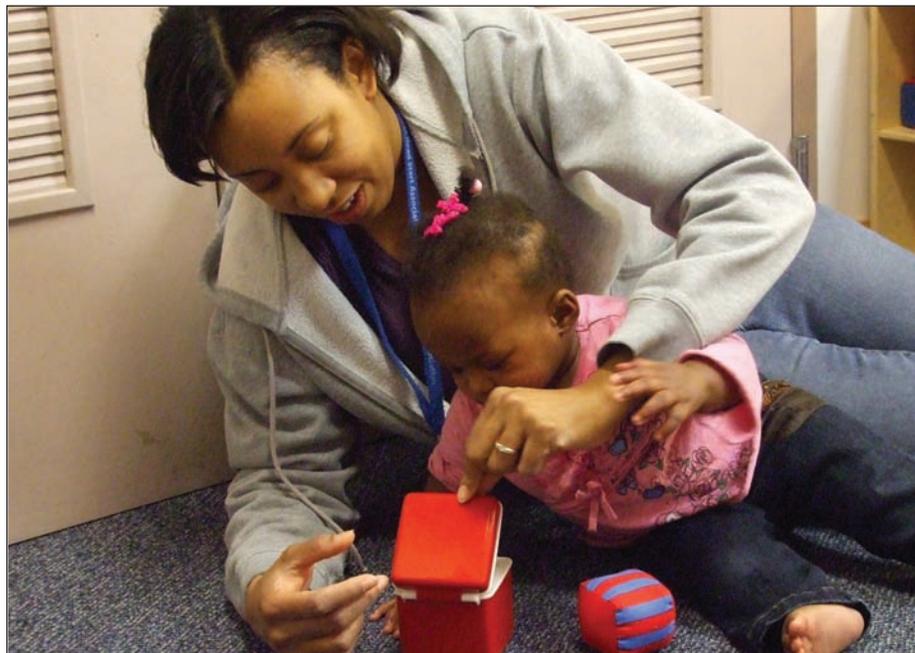
This *Trainer's Companion Manual* accompanies the Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series for Early Head Start (EHS) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS). The *Trainer's Companion Manual* provides background material and suggested activities to be used by the education supervisor or director in supporting the use of these modules by teaching and home visiting staff members, either individually or in groups. These modules may be used during an orientation period to provide an overview of basic information on serving infants and toddlers and their families, as part of in-service training, or for more experienced teachers and home visitors as they review or expand their knowledge.

Each module provides a series of short presentations of basic information. Accompanying each section, there is an activity designed to help the teacher or home visitor to do the following:

- Reflect on the qualities and beliefs he or she brings to the work,
- Problem solve, explore possible alternatives, and
- Practice skills such as observation.

These activities should be reviewed with a trainer such as an education supervisor or director to promote reflection and ensure understanding.

This module on serving very young infants emphasizes the importance of relationships, development, and how young infants need security and help in regulating their reactions. It briefly addresses some information about working with families, although this topic is covered more thoroughly in other modules.

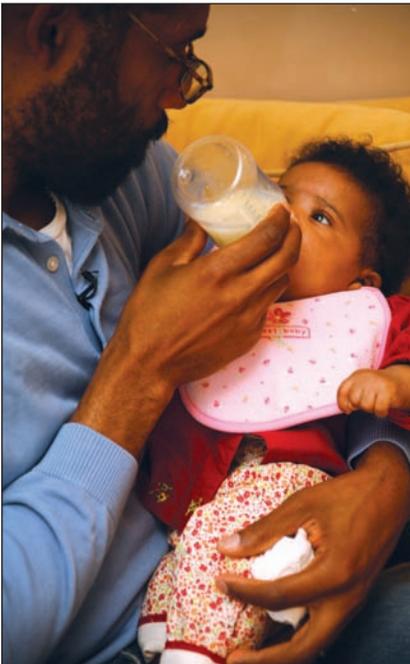


## *Thinking About It... How the Young Infant Grows and Develops*

If working with young infants is a new experience for you, how do you anticipate it might be different for you from other age groups?

If you have been working with young infants for some time, what have you learned about how this age group is unique?

Your teachers and home visitors may have responses to working with very young babies that surprise you—and them. Yet these feelings are ones they may also see in the parents they serve. Young infants are extremely vulnerable. For some people, that helplessness inspires strong feelings of caregiving and nurturance. For others, it can be very distressing. The demands of caring for young babies can be overwhelming for anyone. The lack of sleep alone can make a normally calm, competent parent pretty irritable.



Infant-toddler teachers and home visitors must understand and deal with not only their own feelings but also those of the family. Trainers should model self-awareness, sensitivity, responsiveness, and reflection as they support the development of these same skills in teachers and home visitors.

Issues that might arise for discussion include the following:

- Having responsibility for a vulnerable, dependent life 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Crying being the main form of communication, which is sometimes difficult to decipher
- Difficulties in comforting babies
- Challenges in establishing predictable routines of sleeping and waking, eating, and elimination
- Feelings of anger toward the baby or concern about not falling in love with the baby
- Responsiveness being seen as “spoiling”

As you pose the questions above to teachers and home visitors, you may find they are looking forward to cuddling and loving babies and supporting parents to do the same. Encourage this anticipation while helping them to consider that sometimes babies are challenging to comfort. Discuss strategies to use such as swaddling, holding them upright close to your heart, gentle rocking, murmuring in words their parents use, or quiet, rhythmic singing.

Assure teachers and home visitors that a baby who receives a quick response to his or her crying in the first weeks of life will cry less near his or her first birthday than a baby who was left to “cry it out.”

# How the Young Infant Grows and Develops

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The following several pages describe different aspects of how infants and toddlers grow and develop.

Infant-toddler teachers and home visitors will be sharing the first months of a baby's life with the family. Families in EHS, MSHS, or child care are likely to be experiencing many challenges. Infant-toddler parents may be very young, may be single parents, and may have difficult histories of their own in relation to parenting. Infant-toddler care staff members need the skills to support these parents in their ongoing relationships with their babies.

Some of the basic knowledge required for responsive, relationship-based care is introduced in this module:

- How responsive care builds relationships
- How primary caregiving and continuity of care support relationships
- The idea that relationships are the basis of learning
- How babies learn to manage their reactions to the world
- What makes babies feel safe and secure
- How relationships shape brain development
- How to keep babies safe and healthy
- How to support learning in all areas of development

Two program elements are necessary to provide the opportunity for relationships to develop:

- *Primary caregiving* refers to one teacher being responsible for a small number of children. In the home-based program, the child spends the majority of his or her time with the parents, who are the child's primary caregivers.
- *Continuity of care* refers to one teacher or home visitor working with the same children and families over time—ideally, 3 years. It also refers to the way the program and family work together to ensure that the program environment mirrors the home environment in routines such as comforting, feeding, and changing the child.

In helping your staff members to understand the importance of relationships for young infants and their families, you will probably have to reflect on your own relationships with your staff members, with babies, and with their families.

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### *Suggested Learning Activity*

Ask the group the following questions as part of a discussion. Write answers to the first two questions on the board for reference during the discussion.

- What is important to you in a relationship?
  - What do babies want in relationships?
  - Are these the same things?
  - How can we provide or support good relationships in the lives of the babies we serve?
    - Important elements of relationships might include:
      - Trust, intimacy, emotional honesty, joy, interest
      - Continuity of care and primary caregiving as two important strategies
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## *Thinking About It... Relationships as Foundation*

First-time parents are going through an enormous number of changes. Giving advice is not helpful unless the parent trusts you as a source of information. Think about one parent in your group and what you could do to build a deeper relationship with him or her.

In the example on the next page, what is stopping Tamisa from taking the baby from Marcia?

Responses should include that the role of the home visitor is to support the relationships between the family and baby. Tamisa does not want to come between Marcia and her baby in any way.

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### *Suggested Learning Activities*

1. Ask each teacher or home visitor to reflect on what makes a valued relationship important to him or her. It is helpful to first ask them to draw or visualize a picture of the person—or of themselves with the person. This approach may help them focus and evoke memories or thoughts that create a fuller mental image.
2. Next, ask the teacher or home visitor to describe a positive relationship that he or she is having with a family. What elements make that relationship work well? What does the family bring to the relationship? What does the teacher or home visitor bring to the relationship?
3. Ask the teacher or home visitor to describe a family member whom he or she finds more challenging in developing a good relationship. What gets in the way? Help the teacher or home visitor to think about the family member's life and perspective. Imagine ways the teacher or home visitor could ally him- or herself with that person on some issue.



## Relationships as Foundation

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The story of Marcia and Tamisa provides an opportunity to discuss some difficult feelings that sometimes arise for infant-toddler care staff members. Sometimes staff members can't help but feel that they want to hold and play with these wonderful babies.

However, the purpose of an infant-toddler program is to support the relationship between the baby and his or her family. It can take terrific restraint not to take and hold the baby yourself. However, every contact the home visitor observes between the baby and his or her family provides opportunities to support the relationship. Strategies may include the following:

- Talking for the baby (“I think he’s saying, ‘Mom, I love watching you.’”  
Or “Gramma, I need some help right now.”)
- Making suggestions (“I have some suggestions, would you like to hear them?  
How about swaddling? Does that help him when he’s crying like this?”)
- Helping the parent think about his or her decisions in the moment (“How did you know you should feed him now?” “What do you think she’s trying to tell you?” “What usually works in this situation? What have you tried so far?  
Do you have any ideas?”)

It is easy for young, inexperienced parents to feel that experienced teachers or home visitors may be better able to care for their babies and to feel some jealousy toward them. It is helpful if the teacher or home visitor sees herself or himself as more of a coach than a model—providing support for the parent’s feelings of competence and encouraging the love between them to grow.

It may even be helpful to translate Dr. Perry’s words and say to the parent or family member, “The way you smile and respond to that baby will be part of how he thinks about people the whole rest of his life. What a gift you give to him when you care for him so well.”

## *Thinking About It... The Developmental Domains, Birth to 3 Months*



Very young babies cry for everything! Sometimes they can't stop even when they have what they need.

- How does it feel to you to hear a baby crying?
- How do you feel when you can help the baby stop crying?
- How do you feel when nothing helps?

Crying is an important part of the first months of a baby's life. It is not only a natural reaction to any startling or distressing event but also a basic form of human communication.

Researchers have studied how being able to calm a crying baby helps an adult to feel competent and effective. Being unable to calm a baby is frustrating and leads to feelings of incompetence. If a parent is not effective at calming the baby, then the parent tends to put off responding to the crying because of feelings of helplessness.

Infant-toddler teachers and home visitors may also feel more or less effective with different babies. For example, a baby with colic may be nearly impossible to comfort and can evoke feelings of frustration and even anger in an adult. An adult who has rarely had their own needs met by others may also find that crying brings up feelings of sadness or anger from their own childhood.

Infant-toddler care staff members may react to crying differently from the baby's parents because of personal history or cultural beliefs. These differences may need to be explored and understood.

In working with infant-toddler care staff members, supervisors should help teachers and home visitors to explore their own feelings about crying and should also help them to focus on crying as an important aspect of communication.

## The Developmental Domains, Birth to 3 Months

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It is important that teachers and home visitors be well grounded in child development. There are many good videos on early development that could be used in staff training. Video or still pictures taken in the program can help teachers and home visitors focus on a specific aspect of development.

**Birth–3 months.** This period is an important time of transition for both the baby and the parents. The infant-toddler teacher or home visitor is concentrating on building a relationship with the parents and supporting their relationship with the new baby. At the same time, there are basic skills required on the part of both staff members and parents to ensure the baby's safe and healthy beginning.

Staff members need to know the following basic skills:

- Breast and bottle feeding
- Diapering
- Calming and soothing
- Returning baby back to sleep
- Bathing
- Hand washing

Very young babies are also developing in every developmental domain, and they rely on adults to provide opportunities for learning and development. Teachers, home visitors, and parents can promote development through the following categorized actions.

- **Muscle/Motor development:**
  - Support the baby's head and neck when holding and feeding.
  - Put the baby on his tummy with a few stuffed animals about 10–12 inches from his face for a few minutes every day, as long as the baby is comfortable.
  - Recognize that when the baby sucks on his fingers or hand, he may be comforting himself.
- **Learning/Cognitive and Language/Communication development:**
  - Adults need to help babies calm when they are upset.
  - When the baby is quiet and alert, hold her about 12 inches from your face, supporting her head and neck, and talk quietly to her as long as she seems interested.
  - Imitate the baby's facial expressions and cooing. Use words to describe the baby's actions and feelings.
- **Social/Emotional development:**
  - Respond quickly to baby's cries.
  - Show baby you enjoy being with him.

## *Thinking About It...*

### *3 to 6 Months and 7 to 9 Months*



Young infants want to do everything! They want to look, taste, move, and talk! What do you see in this picture that suggests this little girl is between 3 and 6 months?

1. Describe the way this young infant is using her body.
2. How is she communicating with her teacher?
3. How might the teacher encourage the following?
  - Muscle/Motor development
  - Language/Communication development

- Learning/Cognitive development
- Social/Emotional development

Still photographs can help people focus on certain aspects of development. From 6 to 8 months, babies are usually extremely emotionally expressive and especially open to the world around them. In this picture, the little girl is able to sit without support and use her hands to play with a toy. Her face shows a mixture of joy in her activity and pride shared with the adult taking her picture.

## Developmental Domains, 3 to 6 Months

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3–6 months. Infant-toddler care staff members need to know the following basic knowledge:

- Babies are establishing an attachment to important people in their lives. Consistent, sensitive, responsive interactions help a baby develop trust in others and confidence in herself.
- Babies are actively exploring the environment and are very interested in what they can do with toys—shaking, banging, tossing, and mouthing.
- Babies are very social. Adults need to be active language partners as babies begin to babble the sounds of language. Adults need to name objects, describe feelings and actions, and talk about the order in which things happen such as “I’ll change your diaper and then give you a bottle.”

Teachers, home visitors, and parents can promote development through the following actions:

- Muscle/Motor development:
  - Encourage tummy time.
  - Use dangling toys that encourage reaching from a supported sitting position or from one in which he is laying on his back.
  - Encourage rolling.
- Learning/Cognitive and Language/Communication development:
  - Be a partner in language “turn taking,” answering the baby’s coos and babbling with words and sounds.
  - Offer a variety of toys that are interesting to look at and that the baby can handle.
- Social/Emotional development:
  - Place babies near one another.
  - Respond quickly when baby needs comforting.

## Developmental Domains, 7 to 9 Months

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**7–9 months.** Infant-toddler care staff members need to know the following basic knowledge:

- Babies at this age begin to look at adults' facial expressions for guidance about situations (social referencing).
- Babies at this age are remembering important people (object and people permanence) and begin to show fear around strangers.

Teachers, home visitors, and parents can promote development through the following actions.

- **Muscle/Motor development:**
  - Provide safe spaces for crawling, creeping; provide interesting toys (small dolls, animals, cars and trucks) to examine and toss.
- **Learning/Cognitive and Language/Communication development:**
  - Imitate baby's attempts at saying words.
  - Read picture books daily, naming objects in pictures.
- **Social/Emotional development:**
  - Respond to expressions of feelings with imitation.
  - Help babies be together safely.

## *Thinking About It...*

### *Early Experiences and Brain Development*

Brain development has become a big topic in early childhood. We are learning a lot about the connections between early emotional experiences and brain development. Take a moment to reflect on your own development.

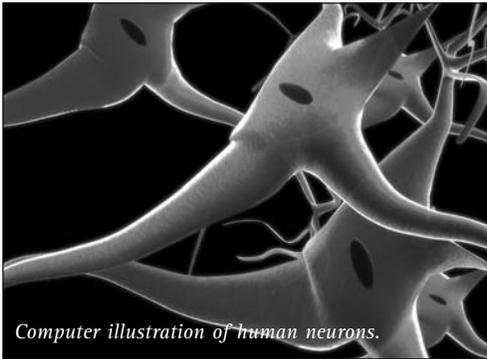
- Have you ever been very frightened? Did you find it hard to think clearly in that situation?
- Can you concentrate on learning when you are upset?
- Think about situations in which you really enjoyed learning.
  - Did you have a good relationship with the teacher?
  - Were you relaxed?
  - Were you learning about things that interested you?

Your experiences affect your learning. What kinds of experiences do you need to provide for babies so their brains are able to learn?

Encourage teachers and home visitors to reflect on the relationship between emotional experiences and their own learning experiences.

## Early Experiences and Brain Development

Babies are born with 100 billion *neurons*—just about twice as many as they will have when they are adults. Each brain cell, or neuron, has an *axon* (a hair-like fiber that carries information out from a neuron) and many *dendrites* (receivers). When a baby experiences the comforting feel of her daddy's arms or the alarm of a barking



Computer illustration of human neurons.

dog, the information about that experience is registered in one or more neurons. Those neurons will transmit that information through the axons to the dendrites of other neurons. The point of connection between the axon and a dendrite is called a *synapse* (Shore, 1997).

**Synapses.** Experiences form the brain by forming the synapses. The synapses that are used repeatedly become stronger. So, the synapses that record how daddy looks, smells, sounds, and feels—for example, the comfort of being in his arms—are activated over and over again.

They begin to record variations in his appearance such as daddy in a T-shirt and Daddy in a parka. They attend to how it feels to be with Daddy when he is attentive and when he is distracted. In contrast, a synaptic connection that is made when a baby sees a stranger only once will eventually be eliminated.

**Hormones.** Experiences also form the brain by producing hormones. Nearly every experience has an emotional component. The emotions are marked by the release of hormones in the brain. Different hormones have different effects on the developing brain. When adults are responsive and keep a baby warm, rested, well-fed, and feeling safe and loved, then the hormones that are released promote healthy neuronal development. However, if a baby lives in a frightening environment, if no one comes to comfort the baby when he cries, or if he is left to struggle with hunger or cold, then the hormones released in the brain will reinforce connections that increase the likelihood of fearful or violent behavior.

*Thinking About It...*  
*Security and Regulation: The Big Ideas in the Young Infant's Development*

Young babies show distress by doing the following:

Crying	Arching their backs
Yawning	Holding out an open hand as a “stop sign”
Flailing arms	Looking away
Drooling	Hiccupping

Observe the young babies you serve, and describe how each baby shows distress and how each can be comforted. Are there differences between the babies?

This activity should be used to promote observation and reflection. The discussion could be extended to descriptions of how each baby shows contentment or signifies a particular need.

## Security and Regulation: The Big Ideas in the Young Infant's Development

The Program for Infant and Toddler Care from WestEd Laboratory identifies three age groups in the first 3 years of life by the overriding motivational themes in each period:

- **Young Infants**      Birth–9 months      **Security**
- **Mobile Infants**      8–18 months      **Exploration**
- **Toddlers**      18–36 months      **Identity Formation**

In this module, both regulation and security are included as motivations for development in young infants because they are closely intertwined. When babies are born, they react with their whole bodies to loud noises and sudden movements as well as their own internal sensations of hunger or gas. When they start to cry, sometimes they can't stop. One of the big tasks of early infancy is to begin to manage, or regulate, their reactions to all sorts of stimulation.



Security describes the infant's developing belief that he will be kept safe by the adults in his life. As adults consistently respond to his cries of distress and help him to achieve comfort, he develops confidence in his own ability to summon help. He also develops confidence in the adults around him to care about his feelings and to be effective in calming him. Repeated experiences with responsive, sensitive adults keep the baby comfortable and creates a healthy bath of hormones in the brain.

When adults are not consistent in their responses to the baby, or when the environment feels unpredictable or even dangerous, the baby produces hormones that tell the brain to stay very alert. Over time, these hormones can create a brain that is much better at detecting and responding to danger than at developing loving, close relationships.

Security and regulation also become a very important foundation for all later learning. For the mobile infant to crawl off and explore, he needs to believe that adults are keeping him safe. For the toddler or older child to learn from the activities and materials available, he must be able to focus (or regulate) his attention.

Adults may relate to a lack of security as a sort of anxiety. When adults are worried about paying bills, marital disagreements, or a car that is breaking down, do they have trouble concentrating and learning?

The idea of major motivating themes in development that cut across all domains is a very helpful one for understanding and responding to young infants.

## Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

- 1304.20(f)—Individualization of the program
- 1304.21(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Child development and education approach for all children
- 1304.21 (a)(2)(i) (ii)—Parents
- 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)—Support social and emotional development
- 1304.21(a)(3)(ii)—Planning for routines and transitions
- 1304.21(a)(4)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Each child’s cognitive and language skills
- 1304.21(a)(5)(i) (ii) (iii) (6)—Physical development
- 1304.21(b)(1)(i) (ii) (iii)—Child development and education approach for infants and toddlers
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i) (ii)—Social and emotional development of infants and toddlers
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i) (ii)—Physical development of infants and toddlers
- 1304.24(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Grantee and delegate agencies must work collaboratively with parents
- 1304.40(e)(1)(2)(3)—Parent involvement in child development and education
- 1306.23(a)(b)—Staff training

## References

- Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the brain: New insights into early development*. New York: Families and Work Institute.